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THE TRUTH ABOUT WOMAN IN INDUSTRY.

BY FLORA McDONALD THOMPSON.

THE common assumption is that by engaging in men's work women secure independence. That there are upwards of 3,000,000 women wage-earners in the United States, that women have entered all classes of occupation, that women form seventeen per cent. of the industrial strength of the people, are facts popularly quoted as indicating the economic progression of the sex. Now, the truth of the matter, as statistics show, is that the woman wage-earner is under one aspect an object of charity, under another an economic pervert, under another a social menace.

As a charity, she is both costly and hopeless. Why she is a hopeless charity will appear later from a consideration of the working woman as she affects wages and society. That she is a charity, and a costly one, is shown by the nature and cost of all special investigations and remedial legislation in her behalf, not to speak of explicit private charity devoted to her needs—the numerous institutions in cities everywhere which provide cheap food and lodgings and otherwise assist the working woman in her desperate struggle for existence.

The great bulk of official statistics concerning woman in industry shows no more than a census of women workers. But when the statistician is moved to make particular inquiries concerning these workers, it is always in the spirit of pity and benevolence—a spirit of gallantry and compassion aroused by a spectacle of woman's misfortunes. A majority include women and children in the same category of physical and moral wrong, that is to be righted by the providence of men's legislation. The eleventh annual report of the United States Department of Labor and the reports of the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics recognize that even a woman engaged in economic production becomes a definite

industrial factor; yet these eminently philosophical reports breathe the tender concern of good men for frail woman. They produce data not with reference to the volume of woman's production, its cost, profit or loss in relation to the wealth of the world, but rather to give official information that her work is proper, pleasant, profitable or otherwise in relation to her sex—always in relation to her sex. The statistician never forgets that he is dealing with ladies in production, and, like a true gentleman, he assembles facts accordingly. A report on the working girls of Boston tells us that "some of the girls say men placed in charge of them curse and swear at the girls and treat them very shabbily;" also, with pain vibrating between the lines, the same report states that "in some places girls employed are not allowed to see callers during working hours."

The report of a chief of a Western State Bureau of Labor Statistics shows, with especial clearness, how far apart from business interests the woman wage-earner appeals to the official mind:

"I would recommend that hours of labor for women should not exceed ten hours per day, so that they should not be kept too constantly at work, but have sufficient time to do their sewing, and when work is slack, they might with propriety be let go home to do such housework or needlework as devolves upon them."

The law of the business world, to which woman is unavoidably subject on entering general industry, is not the Golden Rule. It is the law which demands the greatest production at the least cost. Strictly speaking, business has absolutely nothing to do with the humanities—absolutely nothing to do with the individual save as a contributor to the wealth of the nation. In so far as woman's work serves business interests, business conditions inevitably are adjusted to her interests. Injustice to her in this connection is business suicide; it is killing the goose that lays the golden egg. But in so far as she is of trifling importance to business, or in so far as she represents any sort or degree of loss to business, she necessarily is ground under the inflexible rule of business law.

Numerically, women wage-earners, including all above ten years of age, are 17.22 per cent. of the industrial population. This numerical strength, however, small as it is, is still less as a force in production because the industrial energy of woman is constantly depleted by marriage. At the age when maturity gives

the laborer most power in production, women are withdrawn from the economic into the domestic sphere. Says the Chief of the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics: "The great cause that reduces the number of women in industry is marriage. Thus, the permanency of woman in industry is as a class, not as an individual."

In consequence of this, the woman who is a unit of production has no effect other than to confuse economic problems. She eternally eludes classification with reference to the volume of her production and its cost by fitfully disappearing from the economic order as the attraction of sex makes demands upon her. Her aim in industry is not a livelihood, the laborer's aim and the basis of calculation from which economic equations are formed. She works as a makeshift pending marriage, and thus she tends always to sink to a level with the lowest order of labor, unskilled—the worth of which is reckoned not according to its power, but according to the shifting stress of the necessities of the laborer.

There are, however, other elements than wages which must be considered before we can determine what is the cost of woman's contribution to production and whether or not it pays.

At the outset, there instantly appears increased cost of production in the item of all the conveniences required for women working in factories and business houses. In the better mercantile institutions, these advance from bare necessities to comfort, and even to luxury, in the matter of toilet rooms and lunch rooms, a few proprietors going so far as to serve hot tea, coffee and soup free to employees. These provisions are significant of their economy and purpose, as one is a familiar visitor in toilet rooms of mercantile institutions and daily witnesses one or more female employees stretched on a couch, worn out, sick—thus demonstrating that, as a class, women workers not only increase the cost of production, but diminish its efficiency. The cheapness of woman labor offsets in a measure the increased cost, but such are the demands of marriage, and such the physical unreliability of the sex that to substitute cheap woman labor for men is to substitute a less for a greater efficiency, a fluctuating for a constant force in production—it is, in short, mere money-saving, not economy.

Moreover, as women engage in men's work, they withdraw an indispensable force from household production, which has the

effect of increasing the cost of living while at the same time debasing the value of labor. The wages of women being fixed without reference to the cost of living, they tend, in competing with men, to reduce wages below what it costs to live. Thus, as they abandon the economy of the household for wage-earning, they put labor in the anomalous position of having living expenses increase in inverse ratio to wages. This is a perversion of the economic law of wages, which have always a tendency to increase as the cost of living increases. Women, however, disturb this relation by engaging in wage-earning, and in this instance they have the particular effect of depleting subsistence. Plainly, if wages are less than the cost of living, labor is poorly sustained—insufficiently nourished. Thus, both directly and indirectly, woman in industry, considered with strict reference to economy, operates both to increase the cost of production and to diminish the efficiency of labor.

Humanitarian reformers have regard only for the fact that sordid wealth and cruel corporations are so wicked as to pay women less wages than men. The economist perceives that women who are under no necessity to labor can be got to work for these small wages, and, knowing that the rate of wages proceeds not from the evil heart of capital, but from certain conditions fixed by economic law, he applies himself to inquire why the price of woman's labor is so low. The cause he discerns in the relations of the sex. By virtue of the legal provisions of marriage, precedent in the family relation, and an inherited aptitude for the work pertaining to the support of life, women can afford to receive less wages than men, because, as a class, it costs them less to live. That some individual husband fails to support his wife, that some individual girl has no father or brother or mother contributing to her support, that some individual woman is as helpless as a man in administering to her creature necessities, does not alter the fact that the wages of women are fixed by the privileges they enjoy under the marriage law, the family precedent and their natural skill in feeding and clothing themselves. A popular error made by persons impressed with the injustice resulting to men from the participation of women in general industry, is to consider this with reference to married women only. But, while marriage alone legally establishes this advantage, the other two factors I have mentioned are no less operative in removing the woman

worker from the necessity which governs men of receiving a wage equal to the cost of subsistence. In a report of a special committee appointed in New York to inquire into the condition of 100,000 families dependent in each instance on a woman's average earning of 60 cents a day, it was stated that "the prevailing low wage, inadequate to the support of labor, is due to the fact that, in the establishments employing woman labor, a great majority of the workers are only partly dependent on their earnings for a livelihood." So large a number as 100,000 women, by accident laboring under the necessity of earning a livelihood, were still outnumbered and had their wages fixed by the normal woman—the woman wholly or in part supported by others.

The effect of cheap woman labor is naturally to displace men. The report of the United States Department of Labor shows that exactly as the percentage of women increased in all occupations from 1887 to 1890 the percentage of men decreased. The apparent evil herein resulting is disclaimed by economists who adhere to the principle that cheap labor is to the advantage of production. Horace G. Wadlin, Chief of the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics, says:

"Displacements of men in industry due to advance of women is similar to the effect wrought by the introduction of machinery. It is temporary, and the hardship resulting is also temporary."

This is an error, because woman's wage-earning offers no compensation for the hardship it entails upon men in the benefits of facilitated production such as follows upon the use of machinery. Woman labor has solely the economic effect I have shown—to increase cost and diminish efficiency in production. And this effect is permanent, Mr. Wadlin to the contrary notwithstanding. By marriage the industry of woman is rendered so fitful and elusive of adjustment to economic principle that it defies establishment as a constant force to be counted on, as labor may reckon with machinery. It appears to-day unexpectedly substituting the cheap woman for the higher-priced man, and to-morrow it disappears in matrimony, leaving both its employer and its male rival at a disadvantage, the only definite result it has accomplished being that it has attached a lower wage to the performance of a certain amount of work.

In addition to the evil which woman labor thus imposes upon men, the reduction of men's wages it brings about is attended with

no diminution of men's responsibility. The man remains liable for the support of the family, even though his wife and daughter, competing with him in business, should lower his wages to the starvation point. Woman labor is an economic element as abnormal as convict labor, and it is equally pernicious for the reason that legitimate labor is taxed for its support.

But are the woman's interests served? What has this industrial revolution accomplished for the sex?

It has secured her a competence averaging less than one dollar a day. It has undermined her health. It has trained her in the work of a machine, and made her unskilled in all the labor which supplements the office of wife and mother in the family. It has taken her out of the home.

The mere fact of the average woman's success in industry, as betokened in the wages she receives—less than one dollar a day—in itself is emphatic declaration of the futility of women's undertaking of men's work. The depravity of it appears in its effect upon the woman's physical organism. An exhaustive and scholarly investigation of the relation of men's work to the health of women wage-earners was made by the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics. In this report the conclusion is reached that immature girls should be prohibited by law from working in factories, stores, business institutions of all descriptions, and that the law should have jurisdiction over the labor of all women, to determine, as does the Council of Salubrity in France, what branches of industry a woman may engage in without detriment to her health. In other words, so ill adapted to men's work is her physical constitution proved to be by experience and scientific investigation that a woman's choice of occupation should be legally restricted. The economic reason alleged for this is that the reproductive organs in particular are injured by the strain of men's work, and the human race deteriorates in consequence of woman's impaired physical ability to perform the maternal function.

Beyond the physical ill which results from women doing men's work is an insinuating evil, conducing to economic confusion, which first of all has expression in the modern theory of education for woman. When it is assumed that her destiny is to be bread-winning, the aim is to fit her with knowledge and special training for men's work. Now, in the design of nature, which neither university courses nor political emancipation can overthrow, the destiny of

woman is wifehood, maternity. Abstract these offices from any calculation concerning the sex, and we have the end of the world. It is axiomatic that the first thing indispensable to even the progress of woman is the continuance of the human species. This unavoidable natural office in life determines woman's economic office.

In enumerating the consequences of woman's wage-earning I mentioned that it takes her out of the home. The full significance of this I have learned from my own experience. I can best describe it in egotistic fashion.

Trained to a profession and not trained in household industry, on entering the domestic relation I find my situation to be this: I know next to nothing about domestic economy; I have not money enough at my command to pay for my education in this neglected branch, so I do what seems the only thing possible. I hire a capable woman to manage my house, and by working at my profession I earn money that compensates my family for the money loss entailed by my domestic inefficiency. But when I have thus settled my financial accounts with my family, I am still the cause of irreparable loss to them, and thereby to society. This proceeds from my being under the rule of competition in my professional work. I am subject to business law. An editor will not wait for copy because my child is sick. A newspaper must go to press in spite of the fact that I have a baby in arms. Because I have been falsely educated in serving editors and writing for the press, instead of with a view to the fact that one day I would probably have a baby in arms and a child calling me to work by his bedside, I have had to organize my household labor on a scale of expense which compels me to earn money or precipitate the family into business confusion. Therefore, it is the editor and the paper going to press that I am bound to heed. My baby must develop in the arms of the most capable nurse I can hire; my sick child must do with the service of a hired attendant also. I am in industry. I must abide by its laws. If I neglect my work, there are others ready to seize it. And they will get it. The editor will not be touched by any exhibition of fine maternal solicitude that may be the occasion of my neglect of business. "Business is business."

This is the horror of wage-earning for woman—it reduces her office in the family to a convenience of business. It makes of home a limited, cooperative boarding-house, where the several

members of the family eat, sleep and are otherwise equipped and repaired for the pursuit of their individual interests in life outside. It subordinates the higher interests of the family to the end of money-making. Children are so many ethical problems that seriously embarrass the business success of the mother. They must be organized and disciplined accordingly. The arrangements for their development have always to include and provide for the mother's business obligations. Thus wealth comes to condition human character. Wealth is an indispensable element of human happiness, the acquisition of which is a legitimate, even a virtuous, end of the action of men. But the other elements of human happiness—health, good morals, the beautiful, religion—all these things, without which wealth has no practical value, accrue to society through the immunity from business law (the stress of competition) which woman enjoys in the domestic sphere; and the benefits of these higher elements of happiness are lost to humanity as woman is bound by the conditions of money-making. To be sure, a woman may be free from the necessity of wage-earning and still fail to promote health, morals, beauty and spiritual power. But it is directly in connection with this fact that the greatest evil of encouraging women in so-called economic independence in producing wealth appears. Under the influence of this modern propaganda, advocating "equal rights" to women to engage in men's work, the neglect of woman's naturally appointed sphere in life—the domestic—becomes a virtue. As she departs from the home, and labors outside, it is assumed that thus she enacts the progression of her sex. She thus becomes an item in statistics read before women's clubs to show how the down-trodden ones of earth are advancing. What, thus advancing, she leaves behind, what possibilities in life she forfeits, are questions that do not enter into up-to-date calculations of a woman's success; and thus, where one woman, seriously from misfortune or mistakenly believing it to be a duty, may undertake men's work without stopping to know what thereby the world loses, a host of women seize upon the theory she exemplifies as a warrant for merely escaping from the obligations of their sex. Married, they refuse to be mothers; mistresses of homes, they refuse to be housewives. All that sort of thing belongs to the lower walks of life for women. And so we get a general tendency in the sex that operates to the overthrow of the family, the destruction of humanity.

That child-bearing should be a reproach to a woman follows logically upon economic independence of the sex. The woman who aims to be a producer of wealth is justifiably to be blamed for bearing children. Maternity interrupts her "career," and the demands of business are such that chances are against her making a success of her children. Very reasonably, in the modern scheme of economics for women, maternity is ridiculous—a fault, an error, even almost a crime. Under normal conditions, however—assuming woman to be fulfilling her natural office in the family—what is the economic effect of an increase of population? The truth is exemplified in the boast of the nation. We take a census of the people, and the greatness of the nation is augmented if the population is found to have increased. Why? Because thus, under normal conditions, trade is stimulated. More units of consumption exist, the demand for production is greater; work increases, prices are better, goods cheaper, wages higher, and units of labor—that is, units of force of production—are also increased. In a word, increased population means increased prosperity.

I have indicated how the so-called economic independence of woman is an injury to business interests and a misfortune to the sex. There is still to be considered the effect of this boasted independence upon men. This effect is most significantly shown in the instance of the wife at work. The Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics has found that, when the wife earns wages, the husband earns less than other laborers. Seven thousand seven hundred and forty-eight men whose wives are employed earn less than fifty cents a day. In this comparison I noticed another fact involved, which my observation and experience had previously made known to me. That is, where both husband and wife earn money, the living expenses of the family are equal to the whole sum of the man's earnings. Here appears evidence of how the wife's devotion to business interests fails in conserving the husband's interests. Injustice to the man is clear, because while his wife's earnings may supply to himself and the family what the household loses by her want of application to household pursuits, this is entirely optional with the wife; and I have observed that in general she feels what she earns is her own, to the exclusion of her husband's right in it. She does not perceive that she is in equity bound to yield her husband a right in her earnings equal to the cost of her support, and the amount of the loss or extra expense

the household undergoes through her engaging in business outside. If she did so this would economically adjust one of the inequalities attendant upon the wage-earning of women.

But the most potent evil effect upon men resulting from women's wage-earning is described in a letter by a working woman in Rhode Island to the State Bureau of Labor:

"Because women will work for less pay than men, all about me they are employed to the exclusion of men. I often see the wife and mother at work, while the husband walks the street unemployed, manly pride gone, home and children neglected."

At once it will be urged by advocates of woman's right to all work that doubtless the lack of employment of the man was the occasion of the woman's going to work. Perhaps, but it nevertheless should be made clear to women that nothing but eventual disaster results from such a course; that it is better even for the family to suffer want than to entail upon the man the degradation of character imposed upon him when he becomes dependent upon a woman's earnings for support.

Since marriage is a state to which all women in the course of nature, barring accident, attain, it is to effects as determined by marriage that one must look in defining the principles which should govern the action of women. Facts concerning the wage-earning of wives, therefore, do not describe conditions of one class of women only; they represent the final equation of the matter in its bearing upon the sex. Therefore:

The practice of so-called economic independence has achieved for woman financial results indicated in the fact that her average earnings are less than one dollar a day.

The effect of the practice upon economic interests is to lessen efficiency and to increase the cost of production.

The effect upon the woman herself is to impair her physical fitness for the maternal function, and to subject her to a false system of education, which mentally and morally unfits her for her economic office in the family.

The effect upon society is to promote pauperdom, both by increasing the expense of living and by robbing men of the responsibility which gives them force and success in their natural office of dispenser of wealth to the family.

In a word, the truth about woman in industry is, she is a frightful failure.

FLORA McDONALD THOMPSON.